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A

LETTER

TO THE

REV. WM. CUNNINGHAM, D.D.,

ON THE QUESTION REGARDING

4265.110

COMMUNION WITH SLAVEHOLDING CHURCHES.

BY A MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL.

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WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON
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REV. SIR,—In the spirit of friendship to the Free Church, and of sincere esteem for yourself, I would presume to couple your name, with a few remarks on the question of communion with churches in the Slaveholding States of America. To avoid circumlocution, I shall call these the slave-holding churches.

Though, by no means desirous, to obtain the reputation of a middleman, in this or any other question involving scriptural principle, I yet feel constrained to express decided disapprobation of the personal manner in which the subject has been recently discussed on both sides. On the one hand, the Free Church has been singled out from among all the ecclesiastical bodies in the land, and made the subject of unsparing assault, and held up to popular odium and execration, as if she alone were guilty in this matter. The fact, of money being collected, by her deputations in America, has been represented as a crime so enormous, as to throw the delinquencies of every other body, entirely, into the shade. Now, it must be evident to every man of reflection, that the only question, in the least degree affecting the duty of Christians, is whether it be lawful to hold fellowship with slaveholding churches? If fellowship be lawful, then it cannot possibly be sinful to receive money on the ground of this fellowship, and if it be sinful to receive money, it must be so, simply, because it is unlawful to have fellowship. The money is a mere fringe of the subject—a mere accidental item of the case—a thing in no degree more criminal than to have sat down at the communion table, or exchanged pulpits, or joined in any part of divine worship with those from whom it was received. The question, of sin and duty, turns exclusively upon the point of fellowship. But if fellowship be that which is unlawful, almost all the churches are equally to blame, inasmuch as, with the exception of one or two obscure and uninfluential denominations, none of the churches in this country have formally renounced fellowship with those in America until this time. This being the case, it does appear unfair, and partial, and unjust, to select the Free Church so exclusively for assault.

On the other hand, I cannot but think that most of the recent defenders of the Free Church have kept at a very remarkable distance from the only question worthy of being discussed among Christian men. They have complained of scurrilous and abusive language; they have shown that money coming from bad men, even though it has been acquired in a bad way, may in many cases be lawfully re-

ceived ; they have attempted to show that other bodies have received money from slaveholders as well as the Free Church ; they have shown that the orthodoxy of certain American abolitionists, now in this country, is highly questionable—these things they have shown, but all these, it is evident, refer entirely to the personalities of the case, and leave wholly untouched the question of principle, the question of sin and duty, the only one worthy of being discussed.

Be it that violent and improper language has been used, was there ever a controversy, since the beginning of time, in which this was not the case ? It was so in the Bible Society controversy—it was so in the Voluntary controversy—it was so in the Non-Intrusion controversy—it will be so in all cases where men meet with opposition in seeking to obtain any object on which they have set their whole heart and soul. It will only be “when that which is perfect is come,” that the soul will be able to put forth her utmost energy with the most perfect tranquillity. Indeed, to say that violent language has been used, in any exciting controversy, is in reality to say nothing more than that the contest has been between sinful men. Both parties in general are to blame, though it may be in a different manner. If the one be inflammable as gunpowder, the other may have scattered the fire that caused the explosion. Although, therefore, violent language may have been used, this does not in the least degree affect the merits of the case. *Let it also be conceded that money may lawfully be received from bad men in very many cases*, this does not at all touch the point at issue. The American money was both given and received as an expression of Christian sympathy, and was therefore in the most appropriate sense of the terms an act of church fellowship ; and the propriety of receiving it depends, entirely, on the lawfulness of fellowship. *Let it also be conceded that other parties have received money as well as the Free Church*, this may, perhaps, prove that both parties are wrong, but of itself, it never can prove that either they or you are right. It is no proof that the Erastianism of the Scottish church is right, to say that the English church is also Erastian, and it is, as remarkably, apart from the point in dispute, to think to exculpate the Free Church, by accusing other churches with being equally bad. In the middle of the nineteenth century, and under the benign auspices of the Liverpool alliance, the argument—you are as bad as me—might surely, without any loss of dignity, be left exclusively for the use of children.

And, as to the orthodoxy of certain abolitionists, I am utterly at a loss to see what this has to do with the matter. Orthodoxy is not, essentially, necessary to qualify a person either to perceive, or to defend, the natural rights of man, or to pronounce a righteous decision as to the relations which Christianity should bear to slavery. In that beautiful parable, of the man who, in going down to Jericho, fell among thieves, we read that the heterodox and semi-heathen Samaritan was kinder to him than the orthodox priest and Levite. On the question of orthodoxy, the priest and the Levite were in the right, and, in any discussion respecting that, our Lord would have sided with them against the Samaritan : but, on the question of humanity, they were

in the wrong, and our Lord took the side of the Samaritan against the priest and the Levite. If the transatlantic abolitionists are less orthodox than we are, it will only be the greater a disgrace to us if they are more humane. God often excites and reproves his chosen people by unlikely agents. "I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation."

So far as I have been able to discover, the only thing, in the shape of argument, adduced from Scripture on your side of the question, consists, in the statement that a slaveholder may be a Christian. There is, however, a mighty interval, between this statement, and the conclusion, deduced from it, that it is right to have fellowship with slaveholding Churches: and, so far as I have observed, neither yourself, nor any one of those who have reproduced your train of argument, has attempted to trace the connection. I do not deny that a slaveholder may be a Christian, but to conclude from this, that fellowship with slaveholding churches is right, is to admit a principle of such extreme laxity that it would condemn all struggles, made for truth, in the way of secession, and fix the brand of schism on the whole Protestant world. A slaveholder may be a Christian, therefore, the conduct of the American churches, in the matter of slavery, is such, that we may, lawfully, have communion with them. If this reasoning be correct, then, because an Erastian may be a Christian, we may lawfully have communion with the Church of Scotland, and the disruption must, therefore, have been wrong—an English Episcopalian may be a Christian, and, therefore, the separation of the non-conformists must have been wrong—a Papist may be a Christian, and, therefore, communion with the Popish church is lawful, and the reformation must have been a crime. The principle that church fellowship may be held with any community or class of men, who are not so far sunk in wickedness as to render personal Christianity impossible, would carry latitudinarianism and indifferentism to their utmost, conceivable, extent. It was not by such effeminate, accommodating principles, that you were carried through in your late noble struggle. It was not by such a principle, or by any of its family or kindred, that deliverances were ever wrought in the earth, in times that are past, or from which anything good or great may be expected in the future. I have no idea that any enlightened adherent, of the Free Church, would ever think of maintaining, as a scriptural principle, that we may hold church fellowship with all who may possibly be Christians, but I cannot see what else they mean when it is affirmed that because a slaveholder may be a Christian, the conduct of the American churches is such that communion with them is lawful.

The question in discussion is not, Can a slaveholder be a Christian? but, Is the conduct of the American churches, taken as a whole, towards slavery, as it exists in that land, such as to make it imperative on all who are zealous for the honour of the Saviour, for the purity of the church, for the temporal and eternal well-being of the whole race of man—to withdraw from their communion. This is the question at

issue, and it is a great question; bearing as it does on the whole subject of church communion and discipline—upon the relations which ought to exist between religion and humanity—and on the duties of man to man, and of Christians to Christians, in all parts of the world.

After contemplating the subject with all calmness and sobriety of mind, by the light of God's word alone—uninfluenced by discussions on the subject, for I have heard none of them—uninfluenced by the writings of others, for I have read, chiefly, those on your side of the question—I have felt myself constrained to conclude that the conduct of the American churches, in regard to slavery, taken as a whole, is so unfriendly to the freedom of the slave—so unfaithful to the soul of the slaveholder—so contrary to the spirit of Christianity, and so unlike the mind that was in Christ Jesus, as to make it incumbent on all who have any adequate regard for the honour of religion, and any suitable degree of sympathy with the miseries of enslaved men, to withdraw from their communion.

Separation, from a church, does not imply *that she is not a true church*, but, simply, that she is so impure, either in constitution, or administration, that communion with her is not for mutual edification. It is difficult to lay down, *a priori*, rules and axioms on the subject of separation, *but I think all will agree in holding that we ought to separate from a church, when, we cannot remain longer in her communion without sin*, and, that we are chargeable with sin, when our remaining in fellowship would strengthen her hands in following out sinful courses, or obstruct the progress of the cause of truth and righteousness.

Assuming these principles to be, substantially, correct, then, I think it can be maintained, too easily, that the conduct of the American churches, on the subject of slavery, taken as a whole, is such as to render it a duty to withdraw from their communion. It is the duty of the church, to confess Christ before men, by declaring the whole counsel of God, not only in the way of proclaiming a free gospel, but also in the way of preaching a holy law, and applying it in all its purity, extent, and spirituality, to all the abominations done in the midst of the land. However orthodox the creed of a church may be—however learned and eloquent her ministers—however respectable her membership—however numerous, and zealous, and indefatigable, and successful, may be her missionaries, she is chargeable, as a church, with unfaithfulness both to God and man, if she do not raise a suitable testimony, against all open error and all flagrant immorality, especially where the former is, systematically, maintained, and the latter, systematically, practised. Now, tried by this rule, tried by their conduct in regard to slavery as a system, mercy and truth unite in writing on the slaveholding churches of America, “TEKEL”—‘weighed in the balances and found wanting.’

Slavery, in all its forms, is evil, only evil, and that continually. Viewing slavery, as it exists in America, it is impossible, by any combination of words, known among men, to find terms, sufficiently strong, to reprobate, and denounce, a system so unhallowed, so inhuman, so

accursed. It is a compound of all crimes—a violation of all laws—a dissolving of all ties—a concentrated manifestation of all the wrong, and impurity, and cruelty, to be met with in the world.

When we look to America, we are at once met by the undeniable and appalling fact, of 3,000,000 of human beings—more than the whole population of Scotland—who are bought, and sold, and treated like cattle. Over the person, of every one of these three millions of rational and immortal creatures, his master claims a right of property. They are his goods and chattels, which he may use as he pleases. He claims a right to their time, to their strength, to their skill, to their labour. He claims a right to their progeny, every one of whom he robs of his God-given freedom, and adds to the stock of human cattle which he had previously stolen, or purchased from those by whom they had been stolen. He claims a right not only over their bodies, but over their souls. He claims a lordship over their understanding, and may interdict its cultivation—just as he would interdict any one from cultivating a portion of his ground—as is done in many of the states by severe laws, against all who shall, directly, or indirectly, be guilty of the unspeakable enormity of teaching a black man to read or write. He claims a right to their affections, and mercilessly exercises it by separating parent and child, husband and wife. He claims a right to lord it over their consciences, and compels them to disregard the law of God, whenever it comes into competition with his will. He claims a right to decree impurity by law—to dissolve marriage—to legalise bigamy, and concubinage, and whoredom, in their basest, and foulest forms, and in the most wholesale, and systematic, manner. Instigated by Satan, he aims to dethrone God, and take his place of sovereignty over his creatures. But while he puts forth the claims of a god, he acts like a demon, by treating his victims with the greatest severity, yea, oftentimes, with a ferocity, and rarity, and refinement, of cruelty, worthy of the golden age of the Spanish Inquisition.*

Such is slavery as it exists in America. And is it not a system infinitely, eternally, and unchangeably opposed to the whole scope, spirit, and design of Christianity? The antipathy between the two is just as great as that which exists between Satan and Jehovah. Christianity aims to restore, and refine, and ennoble human nature. All the tendencies of slavery are to sink it to a lower depth of degradation. The aim of Christianity is to raise men to a higher world, and meeten them for fellowship with creatures of a nobler race. Slavery denies her victim his rank in the family of man, and, then, aims to degrade him beneath it in character; to rob him of every remaining vestige of God's image; to obliterate his intellect and his affections; and, as much as in her lies, to smother the immortal fire which was kindled by the hand of the Almighty, and convert creatures who ought to have been

* For the cruelties that are practised, see Messrs Chamber's Tract on Slavery, and full authorities for every item of the above statement will be found in Stuart's Travels in America, vol. ii.

rational, intelligent, and religious, into mere living, breathing, moving animals. What you, on one occasion, said, respecting patronage, is inexpressibly more true of slavery, "it is earthly, sensual, devilish." Yea, it is one of Satan's master-pieces. Here he reigns as the PRINCE OF DEVILS. "High on his throne of state," he here "exalted sits," surrounded by Moloch and Belial, by Mammon and Beelzebub, who, by cruelty, by deceit, by covetousness, by worldly policy, uphold his throne and extend his empire. Yes! the land of the pilgrim fathers, the asylum of civil and religious freedom, has been selected as one of Satan's most favourite residences upon earth. There he has concentrated his forces, and fortified his camp, and raising his banner of rebellion against the Lord and his anointed, he has planted it already in the halls of legislation, and is aiming to display this "abomination that maketh desolate," on the summits of Zion, and to place it within the interior of the holy place.

Viewed in relation to man, the system of slavery, approaches as near to the ideal of perfect wickedness, as the brief existence and circumscribed faculties of human nature will allow. Viewed in relation to Satan's usurped godship over this world, as the Bible teaches us to regard all systems of wickedness, it ought to be considered, as the devil's stronghold in the new world, just as Popery is in the old. It should be looked upon as being, specially, constructed for the purpose of carrying out that antipathy against man which he first displayed in Eden, and of manifesting that unconquerable rage, and immortal resentment, against the Almighty, by which he has been animated since the day he raised the rebel standard, in heaven, downwards. And what is the duty of the church of Christ when placed in contiguity with such a system? What is her duty! It is plainly that of open, uncompromising, unceasing resistance. It is to proclaim a war against slavery, which, like that between God and Amaleck, shall be for ever and ever—a war of extermination—not indeed with carnal weapons, but with spiritual. In the midst of such a stupendous system of tyranny, impurity, cruelty, and satanic malignity, is it not the duty of faithful ministers of the gospel to "cry aloud and spare not, lifting up their voice like a trumpet?" Ought they not to go forward in the spirit of Elijah the Tishbite, or of John the Baptist, thundering and lightening against "a generation of vipers?"

To denounce slavery in the strong and fearless tones of hallowed indignation, *is a duty binding upon them by regard to the divine law.* If they denounce theft, and impurity, and covetousness, and wrath, and cruelty, in their minor manifestations of them in civilised life, ought they not, much more, to condemn and denounce the system of slavery, in which all these crimes stand forth in wholesale, unapproachable enormity? To denounce slavery *is a duty they owe to the slaveholder.* As they would not be partakers of his sin, as they would not have his blood upon their heads, and his soul required at their hands, they must warn him, in the name of Almighty justice, of the crime he is committing, and the danger he is incurring. They must remind him that "God made of one blood all the nations of men that dwell on all

the face of the earth ;" they must call on him " to do unto his neighbours as he would that they should have done to him" had he been in their situation ; they must call on him by divine authority " to unloose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke ;" they must insist upon it that instead of interdicting the communication of knowledge to their slaves, they shall, like Abraham, command their families and their households after them, in the ways of God ; they must expose the whole system of compulsory Socialism by announcing the divine mandate, "*they twain shall be one flesh*;" they must withstand the lawless dissolution of the marriage tie, by announcing the divine prohibition, " what God hath joined let no man put asunder." This plain, open, stern, dealing, is, indispensably, necessary, to rouse the unhappy persons who hold their fellow-men in bondage, to a sense of their sin and danger. All soft and equivocal censures, all gentle and delicate hinting at the sin, will tend to blunt the feelings, and to sear the conscience, and to confirm him in the fatal delusion that the sin is, after all, not so great. And is not the fearless denunciation of slavery *a duty which the church owes to society* ? Such a system as that of American slavery must be, awfully, displeasing in the sight of God. The sighs and the groans of these prisoners ascend before his throne, their tears are put into his bottle, their wrongs are all recorded in his book. As the righteous governor of the universe, what can be expected but that he will " reveal his wrath from heaven against it, by terrible things in righteousness ?" " For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord ; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him." By a regard to the welfare of their country, as they would avert the judgments of heaven, the American churches are bound faithfully to warn, and exhort, on this head, and cannot neglect to do so without misrepresenting our holy religion ; without holding it forth as indifferent to the wrongs of humanity ; as compromising the cause of liberty ; as entering, into easy alliance with systems of wickedness, and into, unholy, confederacy and conspiracy, with ungodly oppressors against the poor oppressed.

If it be prudence, and discretion, and Christian expediency, and wise dealing, with a delicate case, to speak in gentle tones, and in an underbreath, of slavery, then, oh ! how imprudent, how unwise, how void of discretion, is all the ado we in this country have been making about lesser evils in recent times ! How sinful in us to convulse society, and split up churches, and divide families, if we could have done our duty to patronage as meekly, and as mildly, and as discreetly, and as inoffensively, as some are content to see the American churches do in regard to slavery. What is the use of testifying against anything if slavery may be treated thus gently ? If it be meet to testify against Erastianism, to hold no compromise, to endure all scorn, and defy all peril, and make all sacrifices, in testifying against it, then, much more, should we testify against American slavery, which interdicts the teaching to read God's word, and, in fact, usurps a lordship over his creatures, more formal, and thorough-going, than any claim that has, ever, been made in

our day to headship over his church. If it be a duty, in the church, to denounce Socialism, and Sabbath breaking, and all schemes of godless education, then much more a system of slavery, in which all these evils are united. If it be right to denounce oppression, to direct against it the public opinion of the civilised world, then what ought to be denounced, so universally, to be execrated, so unsparingly, as slavery? The persecutions endured by the Free Church were great; the persecutions endured by the Protestants in the Canton de Vaud are greater; yet, when taken together, these are light afflictions, and but for a moment, mere painted perils, mere semblance of hardships, compared with the cruel, and inhuman and degrading bondage, of the American slave. And if, on account of these minor oppressions, Christians have raised a shout, of righteous indignation, that has resounded through the world, shall they be silent about the wrongs of the Negro, because his skin is of another complexion? Rather let all the moral indignation felt at all other instances of oppression be concentrated, yea multiplied an hundred fold, and, in the name of liberty, humanity and religion, directed against this odious, God-defying, man-destroying system. And in the allied army of liberty, humanity and religion, the soldiers of the cross, should lead on the attack, with the ministers of religion, in the front rank, and foremost among them, in the post of honour, the ministers of America, whom Providence has chosen as the forlorn hope who are to take the lead in storming this citadel of darkness, with all its "habitations of horrid cruelty."

And how have the American churches acted in this matter? Have they aimed to declare the whole counsel of God? Tell us not that they preach the gospel, fully, and freely, what we wish to know is, Whether they, faithfully, hold up the perfect law of liberty, in the midst of that land of bondage? Tell us not, that they denounce sin, unsparingly, and are very pointed in their condemnation of particular evils, what we wish to know is, simply, What are they doing in regard to the sin of slavery—the great sin of their age and country, yea the most odious system of iniquity in the world? Slavery is the great enemy of their fellow-creatures, of their religion, and of their God, and by their conduct towards that must their fidelity be tested. It is true, there are difficulties in the way, of giving a bold, and faithful testimony, but, just because it is surrounded with difficulties, the denunciation of slavery has become the test of fidelity. Do the American churches, then, reprove, and rebuke, and exhort, respecting slavery in a manner that bears any adequate proportion to the enormity of the system? There are some whose usual courage seems altogether to have forsaken them on this subject, like the spies who went to search out the land, they can see nothing but difficulty in the way, and can talk of nothing but the necessity of moderation, and the danger of enthusiasm, and the folly of extreme measures. This is the old song, which has been sung by the enemies of reform, and the advocates of corruption from the beginning of time—and if it seems a new song, at present, if it seems a most noble, and most wise, and most Christian song, it is because we hear it sung by some of

the noblest, and the wisest, and the most Christian men of their age and country. But sing it who may, it is a bad song. It is fit, only, to be sung by the tribe of Isacchar, and should never have been heard among the lion-hearted sons of Judah. Extremes!—moderation!—enthusiasm!—mildness!—to talk of these things in regard to slavery, to recommend them in assailing this stronghold of darkness, is just as wise, and as dutiful, as it would be to talk, of the propriety, and the necessity, of advancing, with the utmost possible gentleness, against an opposing army, or to speak, of the high duty, of firing with the, utmost, tenderness against a fortress which it was necessary to storm. In every thing that respects language and temper, men ought to be as moderate as the necessity of the case will allow. But where principle is concerned, there is no room for policy—no room for coming and going—we must state the truth in its full extent—must represent the evil in its full dimensions. Let the American churches be as wise in their plans, and as temperate in their language, and as prudent, in their conduct, as they choose, but let them state the opposition between slavery and the word of God, in its full strength, otherwise, their wisdom is mere carnal policy, their moderation is treachery, and their prudence no better than an attempt to serve both God and Mammon.

And how does the case stand? What degree of opposition do they give to slavery? Such an opposition as will never make the devil tremble, for it does not even fill the planters with alarm. The opposition, even of those who are opposed to it, is of the most faint-hearted description. In proof of this, it is sufficient to quote the testimony of Mr Lewis:—

“But as much as our hearts were gladdened by this kindly welcome, so much more were we cast down by the reception which the Assembly gave to the question of slavery. An overture came up from some of the Presbyteries of the Free States, and an attempt was made to bring on a discussion, but the discussion was refused by a majority of 117, to 69. The southern members, when they heard of the intention of bringing the matter forward, gave notice in open Assembly, that they would hold a *caucus*, the name given in the States to an extraordinary political meeting, in the gallery, after the Assembly dismissed. So strong is the feeling on the part of the southern ministers, that one of them, the most popular preacher in the slave States, declared privately to a friend, that if slavery were abolished he would go to Texas, for what purpose unless to enjoy the luxury of being served by slaves? a singular proof of the attachment in the slave States to slaves, when a minister of the gospel could thus speak to a brother minister. To one of the members of the Assembly, a man of great ability and candour, I said in private, “Do not the State Governments, in forbidding you, under severe penalties, to teach the Negro to read, as much interfere with your liberties as a church of Christ, as the British Government did with ours in its recent attempts to coerce the Church of Scotland?” He replied, “It is too true, we are not in this matter, a Free Church, but we cannot presently help ourselves.” “There can be but one mind amongst you,” I said, “as to the duty of teaching the Negro how to obey the command, ‘Search the Scriptures’! The Government has plainly invaded your province as a church, and that too without the plea of your being a state-paid church. In the sight of God and all good men, you are called to tell the civil power to go back to its own place.” “At present we must be content,” he replied, “to acquit our consciences by disobeying privately, and doing our duty as it were in a corner, even as your fathers held their meet-

ings in private, when conventicles and field-preachings were forbidden. The Assembly is not itself prepared for speaking out, our people are still unprepared, and our hearts are terrified by the consequences, of a separation from the churches of the south, and the breaking up of the Union."

From this it is evident that the opposition of the best and most liberal-minded men is very discreditable; and that the Presbyterian Church, considered as a church, offers no adequate opposition to slavery.

Such is the state of matters, "taking the whole church into view, but if we confine our view to the slave holding churches, we find them the apologists of slavery, and hostile to its total abolition—indeed regarding it as no sin, but, rather, as an ordinance of God. In proof of this, we refer to the following passage, which we quote from the Messrs Chambers' Tract on Slavery:—

It is to be confessed with some degree of shame, that the Christianity of modern times has in this respect greatly fallen behind that of the early ages. Anciently the church was the great assuager of slavery, and often exerted itself to set the unhappy captive free. It has been left for the church or churches, at all events communions, in North America, to discover that slavery, so far from being repugnant to the letter and spirit of the gospel, is expressly sanctioned and supported by it. The clergy of the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist persuasions, have attained an unenviable notoriety on this point. The following may be taken as an example of resolutions passed by some of these bodies:—

"Harmony, presbytery of South Carolina,—Whereas, Sundry persons in Scotland and England, and others in the north, east, and west of our country, have denounced slavery as obnoxious to the laws of God, some of whom have presented before the General Assembly of our church, and the congress of the nation, memorials and petitions with the avowed object of bringing into disgrace slaveholders, and abolishing the relation of master and slave; and whereas, from the said proceedings, and the statements, reasonings, and circumstances connected therewith, it is most manifest those persons 'know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm;' and with this ignorance discover a spirit of self-righteousness and exclusive sanctity," &c.

Therefore, 1st Resolved, "That as the kingdom of our Lord is not of this world, his church, as such, has no right to abolish, alter or affect any institution or ordinance of men, political or civil," &c.

2nd Resolved—"That slavery has existed from the days of those good old slaveholders and patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, (who are now in the kingdom of heaven,) to the time where the Apostle Paul sent a runaway home to his master Philemon, and wrote a Christian and fraternal letter to his slaveholder, which we find still stands in the canon of the Scriptures; and that slavery has existed ever since the days of the Apostle, and does now exist."

3d. Resolved,—“That as the relative duties of master and slave are taught in the Scriptures in the same manner as those of parent and child, husband and wife, the existence of slavery itself is not opposed to the will of God; and whosoever has a conscience too tender to recognise this relation as lawful, is righteous overmuch, is wise above what is written, and has submitted his neck to the yoke of men, sacrificed his Christian liberty of conscience, and leaves the infallible word of God for the fancies and doctrines of men.”

Charleston Union Presbytery.—“It is a principle which meets the views of this body, that slavery, as it exists among us, is a political institution, with which ecclesiastical judicatories have not the smallest right to interfere, and in relation to which any such interference, especially at this momentous crisis, would be *morally wrong*, and fraught with the most dangerous and pernicious

cious consequences. The sentiments which *we* maintain, *in common with Christians at the south, of every denomination*, are sentiments which so fully approve themselves to our consciences, are so identified with our solemn convictions of duty, that we should maintain them under any circumstances."

Resolved.—"That in the opinion of this presbytery, the holding of slaves, in so far from being a sin in the sight of God, is nowhere condemned in his holy word, that it is in accordance with the example, or consistent with the precepts, of patriarchs, apostles, and prophets; and that it is compatible with the most fraternal regard to the best good of those servants whom God may have committed to our charge."

From these statements, it appears that it is the common opinion of all Christians in the South, that slavery, "so far from being a sin in the sight of God," is nowhere condemned in his Word, and, that, seeing it has been sanctioned by the legislature, it *would be morally wrong*, in church courts to interfere in the smallest degree in the matter." To which we may add, that the churches in the slave States are identified, practically, as well as, theoretically, with slavery. Slaveholders are admitted to the communion of the church, and deacons, elders, and even ministers of the gospel, are permitted to hold their fellow-men in bondage.

Of what we have already said, this is the sum: Slavery, as it exists in America, is a system of oppression, accompanied with the most horrid cruelties, and the most abominable impurity. It is the duty of the church of Christ to warn, and reprove, and rebuke, such a system, with a strength of moral sentiment, proportioned, to its sinfulness, or, at least, in, so far, as the capacity of human language can be made available to reprobate an evil that is unspeakable. But the American churches have not acted in this way. They have not denounced slavery with any suitable degree of moral reprobation. In the written acts of one class of them, to use the words of Andrew Thomson, in a noble review of one of the milk and water enemies of slavery of a former day, "We could pick out sentences, and perhaps paragraphs, which, by themselves, a planter would nauseate and reject—and that says much for them—but, really, everything of this kind is, so sweetened to his taste, by the intermixture, or the accompaniment, of what he likes, that he can, easily, swallow, and even greatly enjoy it." Another class of them "employs, desecrates, prostitutes, Christianity to the purpose, not only of palliating, but of perpetuating, a system which, in all its aspects, stands, diametrically, opposed to whatever is righteous and merciful, in that most righteous and merciful dispensation."* The one class discharge now and then a random pistol shot against a fortress which might be expected long to withstand the incessant fire of the most powerful artillery. The other class, by declaring that slavery is not a moral evil, draw a wall of protection around this stronghold of oppression, at the precise point, where, alone it could be assailed with advantage, and turn the artillery of the Divine word, against all who would approach it more nearly, or assail it more rudely. By declaring that slavery is not displeasing unto God, they have taken it under the protection of religion, and, in so

* Christian Instructor, Jan. 1831. The number before his death.

far as in them lies, have done what they could, to perpetuate the system through all the ages of futurity. If slavery be not displeasing unto God, if it be not a sin, in itself, there is no sin in continuing it for ever. If, therefore, it was the duty of the American churches, to condemn the system of slavery with all the moral energy, and strength, that is necessary to express its inconsistency with the Word of God, it must, we should think, be admitted, by every candid mind, that they have been utterly deficient in the discharge of this duty, or rather that the soft and apologetic terms in which they have spoken of slavery, has tended to establish, and confirm, and perpetuate the system. However, purely, therefore, the American churches may preach the gospel, they are not faithful in preaching the law—however anxious they may be for the heathen abroad, they are unfriendly to the heathen at home—they are guilty of misrepresenting Christianity, and placing it, practically, before the slaves and their masters, in a light altogether different from its benign, and catholic, and philanthropic spirit.

If such be a true representation of the case, then, we cannot continue in communion with them, without sin, because we cannot continue in communion with them, without lending the weight of our influence to their doctrines and practices in regard to slavery—to the upholding of that gigantic system of sin and misery, and the indefinite delay of abolition.

Separation from churches, may be lawful, when we cannot continue fellowship without sin, in respect of doctrine, or of worship, or of discipline, or of government. And may we not, on all these accounts, lawfully, separate from the slaveholding churches of America? Separation from the American churches is lawful on the head of doctrine. If it be lawful to separate from men who do not preach the gospel, is it not also lawful to separate from men who do not preach the law—who, so far as the great sin of their country is concerned, are Antinomians? And then, Sir, think of their doctrine about the civil power? Only think that they have maintained that it is morally wrong in a church to interfere with anything that has been enacted by the state—and is not this Erastianism of the most thorough-going species? Was ever the principle of Erastianism laid down before so formally, by any church court, as it is by the presbytery of Charleston as formerly quoted? “Slavery,” say they, “as it exists among us, is a political institution, with which ecclesiastical judicatories have not the smallest right to interfere, and in relation to which, any such interference, especially at this momentous crisis, would be *morally wrong*, and fraught with the most dangerous and pernicious consequences. These sentiments which we maintain, *in common with Christians in the South, of every denomination*, are sentiments, which so fully approve themselves to our consciences, are so identified with our solemn convictions of duty, that we should maintain them under any circumstances.” Slavery, as it exists in the South, in many cases prohibits the teaching of slaves to read, separates between parent and child, husband and wife, and compels in the slave-breeding States concubinage and bigamy. Though these things are palpably opposed to the law of God, it is held by all denominations of Christians in the South, that they are merely political,

and that it is morally wrong in churches to interfere in the matter, which opinion they are determined to hold at all hazards. Here, then, are a class of Christians resolved to peril all in defence of the beloved dogma—that church courts have no right to interfere with enactments of the State, however contrary to the law of God. And is not this Erastianism of the grossest kind? Here is, indeed, a giving up of the church, bound hand and foot, to the will of the state. If, therefore, Erastianism be as evil a thing as you have taught us—if it be a duty so sacred to resist the encroachments of the State upon the privileges of the church—if the supremacy of the Mediator, ruling by his word, wherever it is known, be a matter so sacred—then ought we to separate from the American churches, because they have taught the opposite doctrine in the most slavish terms.

Separation, also, may, warrantably, take place from a church, on account of corruption in worship; and though we bring no charge against the Americans respecting the object of worship, yet there is a solemn charge that may, justly, be brought against them anent the distinction of worshippers. “In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free.” There is a divine equality in the church. But in all departments of American society, the black man, even the free black, is treated as if he were of an inferior species, and this vulgar partiality has obtained admission into the church. However much, according to rule, the worship of such churches may be, it is morally and spiritually, very defective and corrupt, and therefore, on account of the treatment of the black-coloured worshippers of God, there is a lawful ground of withdrawing from the American churches; for how can we show our affection for the injured, but by testifying against his injurers, and refusing them that fellowship they refuse to him?

Now let us view the matter in regard to discipline. It is the duty of the church to debar from her communion all who are, knowingly, habitually, and systematically living in sin. But slaveholding is a sin—a great, and flagrant, and comprehensive sin. On this head palliations have been had recourse to. We meet these, therefore, in the words of an authority to which you will pay great deference. The following is the sentiment of Dr Andrew Thomson. After stating that God could authorise slavery, he proceeds to say:—

But the case is very different, indeed, when man takes it upon him without any divine commission, and without any warrant from the necessity of executing laws against transgressors, to deprive his brethren of their liberty, and compel them to be his bond-men; he encroaches upon, he takes away what belongs to another, and what he has no right to encroach upon or take away. He assumes the prerogative of God, he deals with God’s independent creatures as if they were his own. He steals his neighbour’s goods and property; he violates what the will of heaven has made sacred; he gratifies his own ambition, his own caprice, his own avarice, at the expense of those over whom he possesses no legitimate control. He introduces a system, pregnant, even in its simplest form, and when unguarded by a special interposition of providence, with all sorts of oppression and misery. And he acts upon a principle which implies the right to do wrong, of whose operation he himself may become the victim whenever superior power is pleased to pounce upon

him, and which, if acted upon generally, as it may, if it be inherently righteous, would secure the mastery over this world's affairs to the worst and basest passions of the human heart. This is the slavery to which we ascribe the character of *sin*. *It is sinful in its origin, and sinful in its continuance, and sinful in its effects, and sinful eternally.* This is not the slavery of the Old Testament, for that was ordained of God, whose right to ordain it was supreme and unquestionable. This is the slavery which law-breaking, God-daring, ignorant or merciless men have presumed to practise and have found advocates to defend. This is a slavery which God has permitted to exist as he has permitted Satan to exist, but has never, no, never, sanctioned, which he has rebuked and condemned, but not regulated, which may experience the patience and long-suffering of his mercy, but which raises to him the cry of injustice and of blood, and must sooner or later be visited with his avenging wrath.

Here Dr Thomson declares that slaveholding "is sinful in its origin, sinful in its effects, and sinful eternally." We may be told that the distinguished individual now quoted held communion with slaveholders, but there is a difference between what a person does, when a question has not been raised, and what he would have done, when the question was raised; and the man who held *that slavery was sinful in its origin, sinful in its effects, and sinful eternally*, had his attention been drawn to the subject, could not consistently have held communion with persons who were openly, habitually, and systematically committing that sin.

We are not aware of the hairsplitting that has been had recourse to on this subject; we know that it has been said that slaveholding, *per se*, does not necessarily exclude from church fellowship; but take slavery as it exists in America, and say, *ought not such holding of slaves to exclude from church fellowship?* Besides, consider that seven of the thirteen states in which slavery exists, are slavebreeding states, in which men and women are reared in the same way as cattle, and yet in these states, the slaveholders, the authors of this reckless impurity, are admitted into the church. And is not the discipline of a church in which these things are tolerated, in such a state of corruption that it is the bounden duty of all who love the purity of the church to withdraw from her communion?

The remarks already made, about the doctrine, that it is morally wrong in ecclesiastical courts to interfere with what is enacted by the state, lay a foundation for separating from the American churches on the head of government, in as much as they, thereby, give up the trust committed to them by the great King and Head of the church, to manage all things according to his will, be the law of the state what it may.

Viewing the conduct of the American churches, as a whole, we must say of them, that, placed in the midst of a system of impurity, iniquity, and oppression, they have failed in their duty of showing its utter opposition to the genius, spirit, and aims of Christianity. I speak not of individuals, but I cannot refrain from saying of them as a church, that in this matter they are guilty of open, flagrant, and habitual unfaithfulness. They are unfaithful to the planter, who is

permitted to go on in sin without any sufficient warning in the name of God ; unfaithful to the slave, whose bonds they have helped to rivet more firmly, by that very hammer of truth which should have broken them asunder and crushed them to pieces ; unfaithful to their country, whose cup of iniquity they are helping to fill by criminal silence ; unfaithful to Christianity, whose pure morality, whose free spirit, whose equal good-will, to all, they are so foully misrepresenting. Therefore, in the name of humanity, whose cause they have deserted ; in the name of the law of holiness, and the gospel of love, which they have equally traduced ; in the name of God, our Creator, on whose enslaved offspring they have had so little pity, in the name of the great God, our Saviour, who came to destroy the works of the devil, of whose cruelty and impiety, American slavery is one of the most notable monuments ; in the name of all that is true, and lovely, and noble, the civilised world should raise its voice of righteous indignation, and the whole Christian church should lift up its solemn protest, and proclaim a formal secession, ay, and until these churches shall show a more adequate interest in the miseries of the slave, and give a more scriptural exhibition of the sin of slavery.

And in this work it would be desirable if the Free Church would occupy a prominent place. Being called by the name of Free, it is natural and desirable that she should everywhere be the friend of freedom. She possesses a mighty influence, and it is most desirable that this should be thrown into the scale of freedom. But, if she continue in communion with slaveholding churches, it will be thrown into the scale of the oppressor, because, so long as she holds fellowship with slaveholding churches, she homologates those principles which they hold in regard to slavery, and gives all the weight of her great name, to keep the slave in bondage. It is desirable, also, that the Free Church should give up communion with these churches, seeing this has been done by almost every other denomination in Scotland, and it is undesirable, that the influence of a body so deservedly esteemed, should be thrown in to neutralise the good effect of the testimony of others. And is not this desirable for the sake of consistency in the Free Church herself ? Why complain of the petty tyranny of Scottish landlords in refusing sites for churches, and remain in connection with American slaveholders, who are guilty of oppression a thousand fold more flagrant ? Why withdraw from the Established Church, because of intrusion, and remain in connection with a church which tolerates slavery in its members, its elders, and its ministers ? We are not advocates of a high-handed patronage, we have hated it from our infancy, and warred against it ever since we could frame an argument, or guide a pen, but with all our hatred to that system, we would never once think of comparing either the evil inherent in its nature, or that follows in its train, with the evils of slavery ; we would never think of comparing the guilt of the church which homologates the law of patronage, with the more atrocious guilt of the church which homologates slavery as it exists in the American States. Patronage may violate some rights, but slavery violates, or rather, it annihilates all rights, whether personal, domestic, civil, or ecclesiastical, be-

longing to its victim. Patronage may intrude a minister, upon her victim, but it is not too strong to say slavery intrudes a god—a bloody and licentious deity in place of the Lord God, merciful and gracious. Whatever reasons, therefore, may exist for withdrawing from churches which are part and parcel of the patronage system, those are inexpressibly more valid, for withdrawing from churches which homologate the system of slavery.

Besides, is there not a special opposition between the sentiments held by the southern Christians in America, and those on account of which the Free Church separated from the establishment. All the Christians in the south, of all denominations, are of opinion, that it is morally wrong in the church to interfere with any enactment of the state, respecting slavery as it exists among them—that is to say, though the state forbid the reading of the word, though the state dissolve the tie of marriage—though the state legalize concubinage, and socialism, they are determined, at all hazards, that the church must submit to them. In other words, they are determined to sacrifice all to maintain the very same principle, which you sacrificed all in opposing. They declare it morally wrong not to submit to that which you maintain to be wrong of the highest species to submit to for a moment. How there can be communion between churches holding principles so diametrically opposed, can be explained on no ordinary scheme of opinions, and certainly not on those which compelled you to withdraw from the establishment. While it is the duty of all churches to withdraw, it is highly desirable that this should be done by the Free Church, it is desirable because of the high moral influence which that church possesses; because it is desirable that she should consistently maintain that high character, by acting on the same principles of uncompromising opposition to, and separation from, all corrupt systems everywhere; and it is desirable, because she is the only ecclesiastical body in this country, whose highest judicatory has ever formally declared that slaveholding, *per se*, does not disqualify for church communion, a sentiment which, as embodied in the judicial decision of a church, gives a sanction to slavery, for if it be consistent with the law of God, that I may hold a slave and yet be a Christian, provided I treat him well, I do not see what sin I would commit in compelling a number of individuals to become my slaves, provided I treated them well. The sentiment, that slavery is no sin provided the slave is treated well, would perpetuate slavery for ever more. On the other hand, the sentiment that slavery is a sin, and yet that persons living openly and habitually in this sin, may be admitted to church privileges, is destruction of all ecclesiastical discipline. It is, therefore, desirable, that the Free Church should be true to her noble principles and her high character—that she should put herself at the head of the friends of humanity—that she should shew herself the consistent and uncompromising enemy of all oppression, and the constant and courageous friend of all that are oppressed—that she should follow the example which has been set by the other churches, and thus add to the weight and unanimity of the testimony borne against the sin of the American churches, by withdrawing from their communion.

What, it may be asked, would you unchristianize all the churches of America? By no means. We withdraw from them, simply, that we may not be partakers of their sins, and may be enabled to place the truth before them in all its importance, so that by the divine blessing they may be Christianized more and more.

Some have hinted, that we have little to do with the American churches in this matter; but not to speak of the unity of the church, it is evident, that, wherever our influence can extend, we have a call and a commission to exert it for the glory of God and the good of man. Others will say, by remaining with the American churches, we may raise them to a higher level. This we observe, is becoming a rather fashionable apology for remaining in equivocal company; but it has always struck us as distinguished, more, by other qualities, than it is by wisdom. If the Free Church should, openly, and formally, send missionaries for the express and avowed purpose of infusing better sentiments into their brethren of America, and teaching them a nobler style of conduct, such a result by the divine assistance might follow. But to hold communion with them *on equal terms*—to remain in fellowship with a church, openly, tolerating sin is as likely to be followed by less pleasing results. However clear water may be, as it issues from its fountain, if it mingle in its course with an impure stream, its purity will be diminished as much as that of the other is improved. The shepherd does not keep healthy sheep among diseased ones, in the hope of infusing a portion of the vitality of the former into the latter; neither do men in times of pestilence remain in the infected districts in the benevolent hope of lessening the contagion. In such cases, the disease communicates itself, by a natural process, from one to another, but there is no natural process, for thus infecting the diseased with health. And we have divine authority for asserting, that good men by remaining in fellowship with the wicked, are more likely to be injured by them than to communicate benefit. “Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manner.” “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.” So that, more is to be feared than hoped from remaining in communion, with churches tainted from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet, with the leprous spots of slavery.

Others would wait till the northern churches separate from the southern. This indicates a plentiful lack of argument, for if it be right to hold communion now, it would be right, though every church in the world should withdraw from them. And if it be wrong, now, ought not we in this country who have none of the incumbrances of the northern churches in America, to urge them to the duty, by setting them the example? Let us hear nothing of withdrawing the gospel from such a wide district of the world. All history, teaches us, that, resolute adherence to duty, in defiance of all consequences, never was prejudicial to the gospel, but on the contrary always issued in advancing the Redeemer's cause. And if the day, ever come, when the American churches shall declare against slavery, in earnest, though it may lead to a conflict, it will issue in a glorious triumph, for the church and for the world.

I have thus ventured, to couple your name with a few remarks, on the question of communion, with the slaveholding churches. Though I have spoken, strongly, as seems to me, to be absolutely necessary, in order to speak, truly, on this subject, I hope I have in no instance been disrespectful. I have written, as I believe, solely from regard to the cause of truth and righteousness, and with a sincere desire to promote the glory of God in this matter. If others have been accused of envy against the Free Church, the writer of this at least cannot be so charged. All his views and feelings, and sympathies, and prejudices, are in her favour. He regards her a special creation of Divine Providence, raised up for important purposes towards the whole church and the whole world. Of such a church, every important movement, is connected with the interests of universal humanity, and, therefore, it is desirable that she should ever be found walking worthy of the vocation to which she has been called. In holding fellowship, with the American churches, it appears to the writer of this, that she has acted inconsiderately; but it will only the more elevate her character, it will only be a new laurel around her brow, if she now shew that she is not too wise to learn wisdom from experience, nor too proud to admit her fallibility.

I know the duty here to recommend to the American churches is very difficult. I know it is easy to speak about it at a distance. I feel that it would require superhuman strength to confront it. If they were to lift up their voice against this gigantic system of iniquity—if they were to proclaim war, in the name of the Almighty God, against this double idolatry of Moloch and of Mammon, they would themselves be put under the ban of this execrable system—they would be exposed to lynch law, and the bowie knife, and placed in a situation perhaps as painful, as any church ever had assigned to it before. But the difficulty to which they would be subjected, proves how opposed the system of slavery is to Christianity, and shows uncompromising opposition to it, to be a duty. And in the end they would find it to be true, that he “who saveth his life shall lose it, and he who loseth his life for Christ’s sake shall find it.” In the end right would triumph over might. The greater the conflict, and the more protracted the sufferings, the more godlike would be the deliverance, and the more glorious would be the results. A band of fire-tried witnesses in America, defying, as our fathers did in Scotland, during twenty-eight years of persecution, the manifold despotism of slavery, what blessed, and glorious, and everlasting results, might not be expected to flow from such a contest. Supported, as they would be, by the sympathies, and backed by the moral power of the civilised world, and borne on by the believing prayers of the church, they would succeed in bringing down this infernal system, and thus inflict a stroke on the kingdom of darkness, which would cause joy in heaven, and consternation in hell.

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